Sweet Home Alabama

ALABAMA FOOD





When it comes to desserts, Alabama eateries dish up a buffet table full of Southern deliciousness.

TROWBRIDGE'S ◀ Pineapple Orange Ice Cream. GAINESRIDGE DINNER CLUB ▶ Black Bottom Pie.

When a server in an Alabama restaurant asks, "Will y'all be having dessert?" the correct answer is "yes, please." It does not matter if you've just consumed an oversized barbecue sandwich or just concluded a multicourse meal at a high-end, James Beard award-winning grill; save room for the sweet stuff. The beauty of great food in this state is that you never know where the best is going to come from. It could be cooked up in a cute Main Street bistro with linen tablecloths or at a diner in a strip shopping mall where you pull paper napkins from a rectangular metal dispenser. A normally pedestriantype dessert, such as s'mores—that campfire concoction of roasted marshmallows, chocolate and graham crackers-for example, gets elevated to extraordinary in the hands of an Alabama chef. At restaurants, in ice cream shops, in roadside markets and at bed-and-breakfasts, a similar story unfolds, so go ahead, have dessert. Maybe even eat it first.



An Original Flavor

Nearly 100 years ago, Paul Trowbridge opened the Trowbridge Creamery (316 N. Court St., Florence, 256-764-1503) and paired orange and pineapple to create what has become the ice cream shop's signature flavor and one of the "100 Dishes to Eat in Alabama Before You Die." Today, a third generation of Trowbridges scoops up the frozen treat, although the beloved ice cream has to be made in another location because demand is so strong that it has outgrown the churning capacity of the store.

The Pies Have It

Although pie is found throughout the United States, it is one of those desserts that somehow seems synonymous with Southern cooking, due in part perhaps to the long tradition of pie-making below the Mason-Dixon line. Whatever the reason, filled crusts find their way onto menus throughout the state and onto the list of "100 Dishes." Inspiring fruit and nut flavors of all kinds make the list, but one of the most popular stems from the proliferation of pecans—Alabama's official state nut since 1982.



Dozens of growers dot the state, but Heaton Pecan Farm (309 Sunrise Blvd., Clanton, 800-446-3531, www.heaton.com) claims trees that date back to the early 1900s. The market's signature pecan pies, which regularly receive five-star reviews online, are made daily. Visitors can watch them being made through viewing windows into the kitchen.

The same area that nurtures pecans also supports peach orchards. Peach Park (2300 7th St. S, Clanton, 205-755-2065) bakes a peach pie incredible enough to earn a spot among the "100 Dishes." But these pies are not your traditional lattice-laced ones; they are fried pies, making them even more Southern, right? Noted on www.ilovealabamafood.com,

all the preparation "is done on the premises using fresh Chilton county peaches."

Lemons are not grown in Alabama, but the lack of locally grown citrus does not stop Selma's Downtowner Restaurant (1114 Selma Ave., 334-875-5933) from cooking a tasty lemon pie. It's another one that made the "100 Dishes" compilation. Described by reviewers as "tart, but sweet

and perfectly smooth," the dessert promises a memorable conclusion to a traditional meat-plus-three meal.

Chocolate and peanut butter go together as well as peas and carrots, but are far more scrumptious. The Original Oyster House in Gulf Shores (701 Gulf Shores Pkwy., 251-948-2445, www.originaloysterhouse.com) puts them together in its signature pie, Chocolate Chip



Hop to It

CHECK OUT THESE CRAFT BREWERIES.

Alabama is catching up. Following a loosening of liquor laws a few years ago, craft breweries in the state are on the rise, finally taking a place among others in the nation. Every year, another brewery opens, and others widen their distribution among restaurants, bars and taverns. Blue Pants Brewery's Dortmunder Adambier even took silver in the 2015 Great American Beer Fest's "Historical Beers" category. Go ahead, belly up and check out what is on tap from Florence to Fairhope.



AVONDALE BREWING COMPANY 205-777-5456, 201 41st St. S, Birmingham

BACK FORTY BEER COMPANY 256-467-4912, 200 N. 6th St., Gadsden

BAND OF BROTHERS BREWING CO. 205-266-5137, 1605 23rd Ave., Tuscaloosa

BELOW THE RADAR BREWHOUSE 256-469-6617,
220 Holmes Ave. NE, Huntsville

BLACK WARRIOR BREWING COMPANY 205-248-7841, 2216 University Blvd., Tuscaloosa

BLUE PANTS BREWERY 256-325-1131, 500 Lanier Rd., Madison

BLUEWATER BREWING COMPANY 256-702-4799, 318 S.
Royal Ave., Florence

BREW STOOGES 256-489-5325, 109 Maple Ave. NW, Huntsville

CAHABA BREWING COMPANY 205-578-2616, 2616 3rd Ave. S, Birmingham

CHATTAHOOCHEE BREWING COMPANY 334-559-0663, 505 13th St., Phenix City

CHEAHA BREWING COMPANY 256-770-7300, 1208 Walnut Ave., Anniston

DRUID CITY BREWING COMPANY 205-342-0051,
607 14th St., Tuscaloosa



FAIRHOPE BREWING COMPANY 251-279-7517, 914 Nichols Ave., Fairhope

FOLKLORE BREWING & MEADERY 334-790-8283, 153 Mary Lou Lane, Dothan

GOOD PEOPLE BREWING COMPANY 205-286-2337, 114 14th St. S, Birmingham OLD BLACK BEAR BREWING COMPANY

256-226-1032, 201 Eastside Square, Huntsville

RAILYARD BREWING COMPANY 334-262-0080, 12 W. Jefferson St., Montgomery

RED CLAY BREWING CO. 334-737-5409, 704 N. Railroad Ave., Opelika

BREWING COMPANY 289 Production Ave., Madison

ROCKET REPUBLIC

SALTY NUT BREWERY 256-425-5204, 4411 Evangel Circle, Ste. A, Huntsville

SINGIN' RIVER BREWING 256-349-2294, 526 E. College St., Florence

STRAIGHT TO THE ALE BREWING 256-489-0820, 3200 Leeman Ferry Rd. SW, Huntsville

TRIMTAB BREWING COMPANY 828-545-4746, 2721 5th Ave. S, Birmingham

YELLOWHAMMER BREWING 256-975-5950, 2406 Clinton Ave. W, Huntsville



What a View

When going out to eat, the view can be just as memorable as the meal. Check out these four Alabama restaurants, listed from north to south, where the view makes you want to linger through appetizers, entrées, desserts and coffee.

WHERE TO EAT ▲ Top to bottom: 360 Grille in Florence. Voyagers in Orange Beach.

360 GRILLE, Florence
Reservations are required at this fine-dining restaurant atop the Marriott Shoals Hotel & Spa. Large picture windows overlook downtown Florence and the Tennessee River from the top of the Renaissance Tower. It rotates, meaning diners benefit from an everchanging panorama.

TIP TOP GRILL, Hoover

Savor a delicious hamburger or hotdog while soaking in pretty scenic views of the Bluff Park neighborhood. Low foothills rise to the horizon while rocky outcroppings laced with leafy plants sit in the foreground. The fare is casual and affordable, making it the perfect roadside stop while out for a leisurely drive.

CAPITOL OYSTER BAR,

Montgomery

Locals and visitors alike claim this lunch and dinner joint on the Alabama River has the best view in the city. They call it the "best-kept secret in town" for both its picturesque location and the amazing lineup of blues musicians it welcomes. Plus, the food especially the shrimp and oysters—hits the spot!

VOYAGERS, Orange Beach
Lots of places on the Gulf
Coast have a view, but this
upscale restaurant boasts one
of both the Gulf and Perdido
Pass, the spot where boats
of all kinds cruise between
the bayou and the ocean.
The restaurant is an Orange
Beach tradition, where diners
look forward to excellent customer service, fresh seafood
and, of course, unforgettable
marine vistas.



Let Alabama's 100 Dishes guide you to tasty offerings around the state.

King Cakes

WHEN MARDI GRAS SEASON COMES AROUND,

bakery windows begin to fill with purple and green braided rounds topped with white icing. Similar to a danish, these Mardi Gras Cakes, aka King Cakes, are a sweet bread spiced with cinnamon. If you find a baby in your slice, congratulations! You have a responsibility to provide the next King Cake.

Another cake gaining in popularity—it may in fact become Alabama's official dessert-has ties to Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird. In the book, Scout's neighbor Maudie Atkinson makes Lane Cakes, baking one for Aunt Alexandra when she moves in with the Finches. Lane Cake features layers of white sponge cake separated by a creamy mix of egg yolks, butter, sugar, raisins and bourbon. The whole thing is then frosted with traditional white frosting. The recipe was first recorded by Emma Rylander Lane in her 1898 self-published cookbook.

Though dark chocolate and spicy peppers may seem like an odd combination, the flavors complement each other in Garrett's soufflé.

and Peanut Butter. Two secret ingredients make it that much silkier—and intriguing: Kahlua and cream cheese.

GainesRidge Dinner Club (933 AL Hwy. 10 E, Camden, 334-682-9707, www.wilcox webworks.com/gr) may not have invented the black bottom pie, but it surely makes one of the best around. Its delicate concoction features a dark chocolate filling, bourboninfused chiffon and fresh whipped cream stacked upon a crunchy crust of gingersnap cookies. No wonder it continues to be favored among patrons.

Decidedly Southern, buttermilk pie from Irondale Café (1906 1st Ave. N, Irondale, 205-956-5258, www.irondale cafe.com) deserves its spot among other revered desserts. Crafted in the restaurant that inspired Fannie Flagg's Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café, this simple, creamy recipe of mostly sugar, eggs and buttermilk goes down easily.

Southern Imports

While some desserts may be distinctively Southern, others are not. And that's okay. We can claim them anyway. Or at least do them justice, which is what the staff at Klingler's (621 Montgomery Hwy., Vestavia Hills, 205-823-4560, www.klinglers.com) and Ocean (1218 20th St. S, Birmingham, 205-933-0999, www.oceanbirmingham.com), both in Birmingham, and Garrett's The Art of Food (7780 Atlanta Hwy., Montgomery, 334-396-9950, www.garrettsartoffood.com) in Montgomery do very



well. Reflecting the owners' German heritage, Klingler's bakes Black Forest torte. Interestingly, its name is not derived from the Black Forest area of Germany, but rather from a regional liquor distilled from cherries. True to tradition, Klingler's layers dark chocolate cake soaked in cherry liquor with whipped cream. Bakers crown it with more whipped cream, chocolate shavings and more cherries.

Acclaimed Ocean chef George Reis gives his signature dessert a Middle Eastern spin. Though born in the Midwest and raised in upstate New York, he likes dabbling with world flavors. For his fried baklava ice cream, he mixes together brown sugar, cloves, nutmeg, walnuts and graham cracker crumbs, into which he rolls vanilla ice cream. He wraps the creation in phyllo dough, then deep fries it (ensuring its Southern authenticity). He finishes it with rose-scented Alabama honey. Yum!

Meanwhile, Garrett's pulls from the American Southwest by infusing a chocolate soufflé with jalapeño peppers. The combination of chocolate and jalapeños might sound off-putting, but the Jalapeño Truffle Chocolate Soufflé is anything but. As reported on www.ilovealabamafood.com, the Alabama Tourism Department's blog about Alabama's food scene, "The jalapeños are steeped to extract the flavor from the seeds ... It's then added to the soufflé mix until the chocolate consumes the heat of the seeds." It is topped with fresh raspberries and whipped cream. The dessert is so delectable that it was chosen as one of the state's "100 Dishes."







Paws Off My Puddin'

If Alabama had a taste, it could be banana pudding. Sisters' Restaurant in Troy (13153 U.S. Hwy. 231, 334-566-0064, www.sistersrestaurant.biz) likely agrees. This restaurant, appropriately owned by sisters Pat Rogers and Geraldine Umbehagen, dishes up the fluffy, rich combination of vanilla custard—cooked in a double boiler rather than the instant Jell-O equivalent, bless their hearts—fresh bananas and Nabisco Nilla Wafers. It's

so famous that critics nabbed it for Alabama's "100 Dishes."

Not only is the sweet dessert sought after at Sisters', but also in other restaurants throughout the state. It caps off a barbecue meal beautifully, for example. There is just something about the heat of the 'cue that pairs nicely with the coolness of the pudding. Reviewers claim some of the best is found at Jim 'N Nick's, Saucy Q's in Mobile, Saw's Soul Kitchen in Avondale and Tuscaloosa rivals Dreamland and Archibald's.

Campfire Not Required

SpringHouse (12 Benson Mill Rd., Alexander City, 256-215-7080, www.springhouseatcrossroads.com) brings a camping classic indoors. For its s'mores, the chef prepares homemade graham crackers and warm dark chocolate cake, then pairs them with fluffy marshmallow cream. Homemade marshmallows rim the plate for a decadent, decidedly un-camping-like presentation. The dessert fits the aesthetic of the restaurant's stone-and-wood building, which has at its center a magnificent fireplace. It all comes together to create an atmosphere that the s'mores fit right into—simple, homey and made from scratch. As the restaurant purports, its dessert menu "will provide all of your childhood favorites that you just can't seem to find anymore ... Our desserts aren't fancy, they're simply great."

LEFT TO RIGHT ► Frank Stitt, Chris Hastings, Bettola's Neapolitan Pizza, Nick Pihakis and some members of the Fatback Collective, Bright Star's Broiled Seafood Platter.

Sweet Dreams

It is true that most desserts follow dinner out in a restaurant, but there is at least one folks don't have to leave the house to taste. That is, if they're staying at Mountain Laurel Inn (624 Co. Rd. 948, Mentone, 256-634-4673, www.mountain-laurel-inn.com). Among the many dishes bed-and-breakfast owner Sarah Wilcox serves, her hot apple fruit stands out. It features a layer of apples, cranberry sauce and oatmeal, topped with Alabama pecans. Great for anytime, but it smells (and tastes) wonderful during Thanksgiving and Christmas.



HOT APPLE FRUIT

MOUNTAIN LAUREL INN, MENTONE

Easy-to-make comfort food that's perfect for family gatherings.

INGREDIENTS

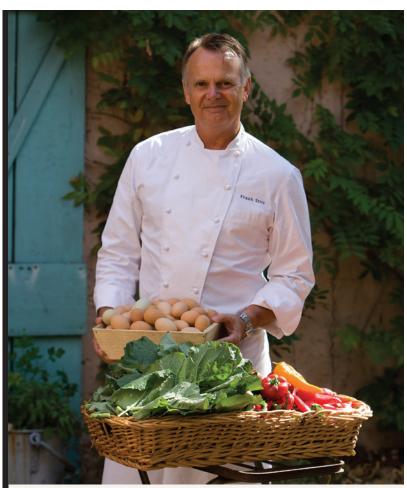
- 4-6 apples, peeled and sliced
 - 1 can cranberry sauce
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2 cups oatmeal Pecans (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Fill the bottom of a Pyrex dish with apples. Spread the cranberry sauce on top.

In a saucepan, melt and mix the butter, sugar and oatmeal. Cover the apples and cranberry sauce with the mixture. Garnish with pecans.

Bake at 350° for 40 minutes.



An Award-Winning Culinary Scene

FROM SEMIFINALISTS TO HANDS-DOWN WINNERS, ALABAMA CHEFS AND RESTAURANTS HAVE BECOME STARS OF THE JAMES BEARD AWARDS.

The secret is out: Alabama dishes up an incredible food scene that makes mouths water. Not only has it captured the attention of the Food Network and Paula Deen's sons, but the state's collection of chefs and restaurants have earned recognition from the prestigious James Beard Foundation. In 2015, five chefs and restaurants made it to the James Beard culinary awards semifinals, including Jim'N Nick's Bar-B-Q co-founder Nick Pihakis, Ollie Irene's chef Chris Newsome and SpringHouse Restaurant's chef Rob McDaniel. Frank Stitt's Highlands Bar and Grill made the list twice—for the most outstanding restaurant in America and for its pastry chef, Dolester Miles.









HIGHLANDS BAR AND GRILL

Located in Birmingham, Highlands Bar and Grill is no stranger to the James Beard Awards. It has been named among America's top restaurants for the past seven years. Patrons rave about the amazing Southern-inspired dishes and signature cocktails. The New York Times recently wrote, "Highlands was a hit from the start ... it is one of a very few American restaurants that has managed to age with no discernible loss of quality in service, food or atmosphere ... Stitt's success has brought a flowering of excellence to Birmingham's dining scene."

The restaurant's pastry chef for more than 30 years, Dolester Miles, grew up in Bessemer, Alabama. As noted on www.ilovealabamafood. com, she brings "a touch of inventiveness and indulgence to every sweet dish she creates."

SPRINGHOUSE

Looking like a stone manor you might see on a verdant hillside in Ireland, SpringHouse presents a casual, yet elegant, dining experience on the shores of Lake Martin in Alexander City. Its chef, Rob McDaniel, has made it to the James Beard semifinals for three years in a row for best chef in the South. McDaniel focuses on locally inspired cuisine, such as Roasted Saddle of Rabbit or Hickory Grilled Manchester Farms Quail. The menu changes seasonally and highlights local purveyors.

JIM 'N NICK'S

The James Beard Foundation does not recognize only highend restaurants with high-end flavors. It also weighs in on casual fare, such as barbecue. For the sixth year in a row, it has named Nick Pihakis a semifinalist for the country's outstanding restaurateur. Pihakis co-owns a chain of barbecue restaurants, Jim 'N Nick's, where he and his team use locally raised hogs. He also is working on raising enough of the Mangalitsa breed to supply his restaurants.

In recent years, other Alabama chefs and restaurants also have earned nods from James Beard, among them chef James Lewis of Bettola in Birmingham, chef Chris Hastings of Hot and Hot Fish Club in Birmingham and Bright Star Restaurant in Bessemer.

BETTOLA

Chef Lewis of Bettola gives his local ingredients an Italian flair, an effort recognized in 2012 and 2013 when he was among the James Beard semifinalists for best chef of the South. He makes his own pastas and cures his own meats for the restaurant.

HOT AND HOT FISH CLUB

Inside Hastings' Hot and Hot Fish Club, the vibe captures New York and California in a menu that reflects a farm-to-table ethic often associated with San Francisco restaurants and an open kitchen, sleek lighting and velvet draperies that scream contemporary Manhattan. Chef Hastings won "Iron Chef America" and the James Beard Award in 2012 for best chef of the South.

OLLIE IRENE

Chef Chris Newsome grew up watching his grandmother make Southern foods from scratch. Thus, when it came time to name his restaurant in Mountain Brook, he remembered his early influence, Ollie Irene. In 2012, Ollie Irene was a James Beard semifinalist for the country's best new restaurant. In 2015, Newsome was named among the best chefs in the South. Food & Wine Magazine claims his quintessential dish as cornmeal-dusted catfish with sweet potatoes, lemon butter and cumin-scented ham, but also directs diners to his delectable chicken liver pâté.

BRIGHT STAR

This year, Bright Star Restaurant celebrates 109 years in business. Greek immigrant Tom Bonduris opened it in downtown Bessemer in 1907, and it has been in the Bonduris-Koikos family ever since. The Alabama Tourism Department acknowledged it as "Alabama's Oldest Restaurant" with a historical marker last year. and in 2010, the James Beard Foundation awarded it an America's Classic, which recognizes "beloved regional restaurants" for their "timeless appeal" and "quality food that reflects the character of their communities."

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